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NOTES FOR BEGINNERS.

BY WILLIAM R. HARPER.

In General.—It is the purpose of the writer to furnish under this head in successive numbers of **HEBRAICA**, some material which, it is hoped, may prove to be interesting and profitable to that large class of the journal's constituency, those who are *beginners*. The word *beginner* is not, however, in this connection taken in its literal sense. While some of the suggestions made, and some of the hints offered may be of value only to those who are actual beginners, the material, in general, will be intended for those who have made at least some progress in the language. The "Notes" will be varied in their character, and designed to stimulate study in lines which perhaps the student, if left to himself, might overlook.

Origin of Various Vowel-sounds.—In the study of Hebrew the greatest difficulty experienced is the mastery of the principles which regulate the use of the various vowel-points. The question which one must ask and answer, several times perhaps in the case of every word, is this: How does there come to be here a Š'wâ, or a short vowel, or a long vowel? And in this question there are implied many subordinate questions. E. g., if it is a Š'wâ, it must be known (1) whether it is silent or vocal; (2) if vocal, from what earlier full vowel-sound it is derived; and (3) why it was changed from this original sound to a Š'wâ. If the vowel under consideration is *long*, the questions are: (1) What kind of a syllable is this? (2) Is the vowel tone-long or naturally long? (3) If naturally long, has it arisen from contraction, or in compensation, or because it is characteristic of a nominal form? (4) From what original sound or sounds has it come?

These questions can *always* be answered; and the man who has studied his Hebrew grammar through without learning the principles which furnish the answers, has studied it in vain. It is to be remembered, that a knowledge of the Massoretic system of vowel-points lies at the basis of all truly accurate and scientific knowledge of Hebrew. With this once mastered, the remaining work is comparatively easy.

Relative Occurrence of Vowel-sounds.—It may be of interest to know the relative frequency of occurrence of half-, short and long vowels in Hebrew. There is given below a table from which a reasonably accurate idea may be gained. The first four chapters of Genesis have been taken as a basis for calculation. This table shows that the average word has 2.76 vowel-sounds; that of a hundred vowel-sounds nearly sixteen are half-vowels, twenty-nine are short

vowels, fifty-five are long vowels. The long vowels are nearly twice as numerous as the short vowels, and three and a half times as numerous as the half-vowels. In this calculation no account has been taken of Pāthāḥ-furtive, and no distinction made between simple (vocal) and compound Š'wā.

	Verses.	Words.	Vowel-sounds.	Half-vowels.	Short vowels.	Long vowels.
Chapter I.	31	363	1042	173	316	553
Chapter II.	25	283	769	124	217	428
Chapter III.	24	298	821	117	225	479
Chapter IV.	26	290	784	121	240	423
Total		1234	3416	535	998	1883

The Nominative Absolute.—A construction not sufficiently emphasized in most grammars, and one worthy of careful study is that of the *Nominative Absolute*.¹ Consider the subject in the following way: (1) Note the use of הָאֵרֶץ in Gen. xxviii., 13, and find a similar construction in Gen. xxvi., 15; Deut. ii., 23; xiv., 27; Josh. ix., 12. (2) Note the use of שָׁכֶם in Gen. xxxiv., 8 and find a similar construction in Deut. xxxii., 4; xxxiii., 17; 1 Sam. iii., 11. (3) Note the use of הָאִישׁ מִיכָה in Judg. xvii., 5 and find a similar construction in Lev. vii., 7, 33; Job xxii., 8. (4) Note the use of אֲנִי in Gen. xvii., 4 and find a similar construction in Gen. xxiv., 27; xlii., 11; Deut. xviii., 14.

Now study the phrases הָאֱלֹהִים הוּא יְהוָה *Jehovah, HE (is) the God*; הַדָּם הוּא הַנֶּפֶשׁ *the blood, THAT is the life*. What is called the copula in these phrases, viz., הוּא, is really the subject of which הָאֱלֹהִים in one case and הַנֶּפֶשׁ in the other is the predicate; while the first word in each phrase is strictly speaking a nominative absolute, although logically the subject of the sentence. Compare with this similar cases in Gen. ii., 14, 19; ix., 18; xv., 2; Isa. ix., 14; xxxiii., 6.

The following statement will serve now as a summing up of the matter: For the sake of emphasis and for the avoidance of unwieldy sentences a noun or pronoun is frequently placed at the beginning of the sentence with, strictly speaking, no grammatical relation to the other words of the sentence, but represented in the body of the sentence by a pronominal suffix. This noun or pronoun may be *logically* the object of the sentence, or its subject, or the object of a preposition; or standing as the logical subject, it may be resumed by the pronoun הוּא which then, though really the grammatical subject of the following predicate, is equivalent, or nearly so, to a copula.

Other particulars might be noted, but for the first study, this is sufficient.

The Word לֵב or לֶבֶב.—Many students never take up their dictionary except to examine it with reference to something which has come up at the very

¹ See, however, Appendix V. 1, *The Casus Pendens* in Driver's Use of the Tenses in Hebrew, upon which this is based.